

Social inequalities and correlates of alcohol abuse among young adults: a population-based questionnaire study

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Background

Alcohol abuse is a public health problem, and young adults with certain living conditions, lifestyle and self-personality traits are subjected to a higher risk for alcohol abuse, while the respective roles of these factors and especially in mediating the social disparities in alcohol abuse is not well known.

This study assessed social inequalities in alcohol abuse among young adults and whether they were mediated by sex, low education, living alone, low income, poor health, family support, personality traits, and disabilities.

Methods

The sample included 1,905 subjects aged 18-34 years, randomly selected from North-eastern France.

Subjects completed a post-mailed questionnaire that covered: sex, date of birth, height, weight, educational level, socio-occupational category, alcohol abuse (Deta questionnaire, at least one positive response to four items), health status, disabilities (according to the WHO's classification), family condition, living alone, family support, perceived income, and some self-reported personality traits.

Data were analyzed through the logistic regression model, using two sets of independent variables and covariates, in order to describe the gender disparities and investigate the role of individual factors.

Results

Alcohol abuse was common: 18.7%.

Compared with upper/intermediate professionals, significant OR adjusted for sex were found for manual workers and employees but not for other professionals, students (close to significance), housewives, and unemployed people (Table 1).

Adjusting for all confounders did not or reduced slightly the OR for various socio-occupational categories although they become non-significant (Table 2).

The significant confounders were (Table 2):

- Sex,
- Poor health,
- Hearing disability,
- Cognitive disability,
- Living alone,
- Low income,
- Being not-sociable, and
- Being aggressive.

Table 1. Odds ratios adjusted for sex and 95% CI (n=1,905)

	ORa	95% CI
Upper/intermediate professionals	1.00	
Manual workers	1.59*	1.05-2.42
Employees	1.55*	1.02-2.37
Other professionals	1.31	0.78-2.21
Housewives	1.63	0.79-3.35
Unemployed people	1.29	0.71-2.38
Students	1.41§	0.93-2.13

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001, §p<0.10.

Table 2. Relationships of alcohol abuse with various risk factors: adjusted odds ratios (ORa) and 95% CI (n=1,905)

	ORa	95% CI
Socio-occupational category		
Upper and Intermediate professionals	1.00	
Manual workers	1.48	0.91-2.40
Employees	1.56§	0.99-2.46
Other professionals	1.32	0.76-2.31
Housewives	1.59	0.73-3.45
Unemployed	1.14	0.59-2.19
Students	1.37	0.88-2.13
Women		
	4.25***	3.20-5.65
Poor health		
	1.46**	1.09-1.96
Hearing disability		
	1.71*	1.02-2.87
Seeing disability		
	0.78	0.49-1.25
Cognitive disability		
	1.46*	1.08-1.98
Primary education		
	0.77	0.57-1.05
Living alone		
	1.59**	1.10-2.29
Low income (with difficulties)		
	1.38*	1.06-1.78
Lack of family support		
	0.76	0.50-1.17
Self-reported personality		
Worried	1.10	0.81-1.48
Not sociable	1.29*	1.01-1.65
Not calm	1.30§	0.97-1.73
Aggressive	1.81**	1.20-2.75
Nervous	0.82	0.61-1.09
Sad	1.42	0.80-2.53

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001, §p<0.10.

Conclusions

There are social disparities in alcohol abuse among young adults.

Sex, poor health, disabilities, living alone, low income, and self-personality traits are significant risk factors for alcohol abuse, but they do play a small role in explaining the social disparities.

Preventive measures should aim at improving working conditions and to help people to be aware of the benefits of improving their living conditions and lifestyle.

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